

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7835
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AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: PEPR, PDIP, CB, TH
SUBJ: IENG SARY PRESS CONFERENCE (III)
REF: BANGKOK 20198

SUMMARY: DURING A JULY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE, CAMBODIAN
DEPUTY PM IENG SARY LAUNCHED REPEATED ATTACKS ON THE
VIETNAMESE FOR THEIR AMBITIONS TO TAKE OVER CAMBODIA AND
ULTIMATELY ESTABLISH AN EMPIRE IN SE ASIA. SARY ALSO
DENIED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT COMMITTED ATROCITIES AGAINST
ITS POPULATION. POPULAR SUPPORT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
VIETNAM WAS CITED AS EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERN-
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MENT IN PHNOM PENH. SARY PASSED LIGHTLY BUT OPTIMISTIC-
ALLY OVER THAI-CAMBODIAN ISSUES. SOME WESTERN
JOURNALISTS AND THAI OFFICIALS SUSPECT THAT ONE OF SARY'S
AIMS MAY HAVE BEEN TO USE BANGKOK AS A PUBLIC PLATFORM
TO ENGAGE IN PROPAGANDA WAR AGAINST VIETNAM. WHILE WE
HAVE NOT YET DISCUSSED THE VISIT WITH RTG OFFICIALS, ON
THE SURFACE IT APPEARS THAT THE TALKS WERE INCONCLUSIVE

AT THE UPPADIT LEVEL. WE DO NOT YET HAVE A READING ON THE KRIANGSAK-SARY SESSION BEYOND GENERAL REMARKS COVERED IN PRESS. END SUMMARY.

1. AT A 5 PM PRESS CONFERENCE SHORTLY BEFORE DEPARTING BANGKOK JULY 17, CAMBODIAN DEP PM IENG SARY MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

"THE DELEGATION OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA IS VERY HAPPY THAT ITS CURRENT VISIT TO THAILAND HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFULLY CARRIED OUT. THE TALKS BETWEEN THE KAMPUCHEAN AND THE THAI DELEGATIONS WERE SUCCESSFUL AND HAVE ACHIEVED VERY SATISFACTORY RESULTS. I ASSUME THAT THE THAI FOREIGN MINISTER HAS ALREADY GIVEN YOU THE DETAILS OF THE TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO DELEGATIONS. I WOULD LIKE TO ADD HERE THAT THE TWO SIDES HAVE REACHED MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND GOTTEN DOWN TO THE ROOTS OF ALL EXISTING PROBLEMS. THE TWO SIDES HAVE MADE EFFORTS TOWARD ACHIEVING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE FOR THE PEOPLES OF THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES BASED ON THE FIVE PRINCIPLES.

"DURING ITS VISIT TO THAILAND, THE DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEAN DELEGATION HAS BEEN ACCORDED A VERY WARM AND FRIENDLY WELCOME AND HAS RECEIVED THE KIND ATTENTION OF PRIME MINISTER GEN KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN AND THE THAI GOVERNMENT. THE TALKS THAT THE KAMPUCHEAN DELEGATION HAD WITH HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS EXCELLENCY FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN HAVE FURTHER DEVELOPED MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OVER THE UNDERSTANDING ACHIEVED AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR.

"THE DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEAN DELEGATION HOPES THAT THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRENGTHENING OF THE FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND KAMPUCHEA AND WILL BENEFIT THE THAI AND KAMPUCHEAN PEOPLE AS WELL AS THE PEOPLE OF OTHER COUNTRIES IN THIS REGION."

2. OPENING STATEMENT WAS FOLLOWED BY QUESTION AND ANSWERS WHICH FOCUSSED ON KAMPUCHEAN RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM. SARY CLAIMED THAT THE "VICTORY OF THE KHMERS (IN JANUARY 1978) OVER THE INVADING VIETNAMESE HAD SIGNIFICANCE BEYOND THE BORDERS OF CAMBODIA." "THE VIETNAMESE," SARY ASSERTED, "WANTED TO SWALLOW CAMBODIA AS THE FIRST STEP TO EXPANDING OVER THE WHOLE OF SE ASIA. THEY ARE AIMING FOR AN EMPIRE IN THE REGION," HE CLAIMED. HE ALSO CHARGED THAT HANOI HAD INSTIGATED SEVERAL COUP ATTEMPTS IN CAMBODIA. SARY ARGUES THAT AN INDEPENDENT, NON-ALIGNED CAMBODIA WAS IN THE BEST

INTERESTS OF SE ASIA.

3. SARY SAID THAT "IF VIETNAM COULD TAKE OVER CAMBODIA IN 24 HOURS IT WOULD DO SO. BUT IT HAS NOT DON SO BECAUSE IT CANNOT," HE ASSERTED. HE DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A MASSIVE VIETNAMESE RAID RECENTLY INVOLVING 60-80,000 TROOPS. CONTRADICTING SARY, RADIO PHNOM PENH JULY 17 CLAIMED A GREAT VICTORY OVER 70,000 VIETNAMESE INVADERS

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IN JUNE. RESPONDING TO CHARGES OF ATROCITIES AGAINST ITS OWN PEOPLE, SARY SAID, "IF THE KHMER GOVERNMENT HAD COMMITTED ATROCITIES AGAINST ITS OWN PEOPLE, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY UNITED UNDER ITS LEADERS TO THROW BACK THE INVADING VIETNAMESE." HE CLAIMED THAT AN OFFICIAL SURVEY IN 1976 INDICATED THAT THERE WERE 7.75 MILLION PEOPLE IN CAMBODIA.

4. SARY ALSO DENIED THAT THERE WERE CHINESE MILITARY

ADVISORS ON THE FRONT FACING VIETNAM. THE FIGHT AGAINST THE FRENCH COLONIALISTS HAD TAUGHT THEM TO RELY ONLY ON THEIR OWN FORCES, HE ADDED.
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5. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ABOUT KHMER ROUGE SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY THAILAND, SARY SAID THAT CAMBODIA WOULD NOT INTERFERE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES. (SEPARATELY, IT WAS REPORTED THAT SARY EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE ASEAN GOAL OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY IN SE ASIA.)

6. SARY DECLARED THAT PRINCE SIHANOUK STILL LIVES IN PHNOM PENH WITH THE STATUS OF CHIEF OF STATE.

7. EARLIER IN THE DAY, SARY PRESIDED OVER THE OPENING OF FILM SHOW, ATTENDED BY ABOUT 200 NEWSPEOPLE. THE FIRST FILM, PRODUCED BY THE CAMBODIAN MFA IN FEBRUARY 1977, SHOWED LARGE NUMBERS OF YOUTHS WORKING IN RURAL FIELDS. EMPHASIS WAS ON THE DETERMINATION OF THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS OF CAMBODIA TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

AND TO RECONSTRUCT THE COUNTRY, THROUGH SELF-RELIANCE. CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN PRODUCTIVE ROLES WAS STRESSED. THE SECOND FILM WAS TITLED, "THE TRUE NATURE OF VIETNAMESE AGGRESSION". SOME OF THE FOOTAGE WAS FILMED OF ACTION DURING THE BORDER WAR IN JANUARY CAMBODIAN PM POL POT WAS SHOWN TELLING A LARGE GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT THE INITIAL VICTORY AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE ON JANUARY 6, 1978, WAS AS SIGNIFICANT AS THE LIBERATION OF PHNOM PENH IN APRIL 1975.

8. SEPARATELY, IN A FRIENDLY THAI GESTURE PRESS REPORTED THAT AIR CHIEF MARSHAL PHANIANG KANTARAT OFFERED IENG SARY THE RETURN OF THREE AIR CAMBODGE AIRCRAFT FLOWN TO THAILAND JUST BEFORE THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF PHNOM PENH IN 1975. AIRCRAFT ARE A CARAVELLE 990 FOUR ENGINE JET-
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LINER AND TWO C-47 PROPELLOR-DRIVEN TWIN ENGINE PLANES, ALL OF WHICH WOULD REQUIRE SOME REPAIR PRIOR TO THEIR RETURN.

9. SARY DEPARTED AT 2020 JULY 17 FOR ROMANIA AND YUGOSLAVIA. HE WAS SEEN OFF BY DEPUTY PM SUNTHORN

HONGLADAROM AND FONMIN UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN.

10. IN OTHER REACTIONS, THAI AND ENGLISH PRESS HAS EXPRESSED HOPE THAT POSITIVE RESULTS WILL FLOW FROM THE VISIT, BUT NOTED POINTEDLY THAT NO GUARANTEES OR MECHANISM HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED TO ENSURE REDUCTION OF BORDER DIFFICULTIES.

11. A RELIABLE AMERICAN JOURNALIST GAVE US THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF EVENING DINNER CONVERSATION INVOLVING WESTERN AND JAPANESE PRESS, SOVIET EMOFFS, AND THAI OFFICIALS. RUSSIANS DESCRIBED THE VISIT AS A "TOTAL FAILURE". CONSENSUS AMONG OTHERS WAS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR THAI-CAMBODIAN RELATIONS. GROUP SAW RESULTS AS SLIM, WEIGHTED HEAVILY FROM CAMBODIAN SIDE AS AN EXERCISE IN ANTI-VIETNAM PROPAGANDA RATHER THAN AS SERIOUS DISCUSSION WITH THE THAIS ABOUT BI-LATERAL PROBLEMS. CORROBORRATING THIS IMPRESSION, THE AMERICAN JOURNALIST NOTED THAT SARY PICKED OUT THE QUESTIONS AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH GAVE HIM LEADS TO ATTACK HANOI AND PASSED VERY LIGHTLY OVER BI-LATERAL THAI-CAMBODIAN ISSUES. IN CONTRAST, DURING HIS 1975 VISIT TO THAILAND, NEWSMAN SAID SARY POINTEDLY REFUSED TO ALLOW ENGLISH TO BE USED IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE, SAYING SNAPPILY THAT HE WAS IN THAILAND. CONFERENCE YESTERDAY WAS TRANSLATED

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INTO ENGLISH NOT THAI, FROM WHICH U.S. JOURNALIST CON-
CLUDED THAT SARY WAS PLAYING MORE TO THE INTERNATIONAL
THAN THE THAI AUDIENCE. FILMS ALSO WERE NARRATED IN
ENGLISH. HIS ARRIVAL STATEMENT ALSO WAS IN KHMER AND
ENGLISH, NOT THAI.

12. REGARDING POSSIBILITY OF U.S. JOURNALISTS TRAVELLING
TO CAMBODIA, SARY TOLD NEW YORK TIME'S HENRY KAMM, WHOM
HE HAD MET DURING GRUNK DAYS IN A MEETING WITH SIHANOUK
AND SARY IN ROMANIA, THAT KAMM WOULD "VISIT CAMBODIA
ONE DAY, NOT TOO FAR AWAY BUT NOT TOO SOON."

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13. COMMENT: WE WILL BE SEEING THAI OFFICIALS OVER THE
NEXT FEW DAYS. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE THUS FAR BEEN UNABLE
TO OBTAIN A GOOD READING ON THE CRUCIAL MEETING BETWEEN
APPEAR ON THE SURFACE TO HAVE BEEN INCONCLUSIVE ON THE
MAJOR ISSUES.

14. SARY HAS PUBLICLY EXUDED AN AIR OF CONFIDENCE. HE
TOOK AN AGGRESSIVE TACK WITH THE PRESS, UNDAUNTED BY
CRITICAL QUESTIONS PARTICULARLY OF CONDITIONS IN
CAMBODIA. HIS RESPONSES ARE OBVIOUSLY SUSPECT, BUT HE
FORCED THE PRESS TO DEAL WITH HIM ON HIS OWN TERMS,
USING THE CONFERENCE AS A PUBLIC PLATFORM FOR CAMBODIAN
VIEWS, FOCUSSING PARTICULARLY ON VIETNAM. ON A MINOR
NOTE IT WAS SURPRISING TO NOTE THAT SARY DESCRIBED
SIHANOUK AS "CHIEF OF STATE". O'DONOHUE

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Message Attributes

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Type: TE
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